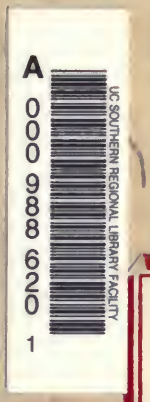

WEEKS

Withholding a Suitable
Support From the Ministers
... is Robbing God.

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Withholding a suitable support from the Ministers of Religion, is robbing God:

A

SERMON,

PREACHED TO THE PRESBYTERIAN CONGREGATION IN

PLATTSBURGH, N. Y.

SEPTEMBER 26, 1813.

BY WILLIAM R. WEEKS,

AT THAT TIME PASTOR OF SAID CONGREGATION.

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A SERMON, &c.

IT is the indispensible duty of the ministers of the gospel to declare to their people all the counsel of God. Every doctrine that God has revealed, and every duty that he has enjoined, must be freely and plainly taught. If a minister neglects to preach any doctrine of the gospel, and his people perish through ignorance of the way of life, their blood will be upon his head; and if he neglects to inculcate any duty that God has enjoined, and his people, through ignorance, live in the practice of disobedience to God's commands, he is a partaker in their sins. Some doctrines are of such a nature, that to preach them faithfully and plainly requires no self-denial. The great mercy of God in providing salvation for perishing sinners, his great wisdom and goodness in governing the world, in over-ruling the wrath and the wickedness of men and devils, and making their utmost efforts instrumental of promoting his own glory, and securing the best interests of his holy kingdom, are subjects which we dwell upon with pleasure, as in themselves exceedingly interesting and delightful. But other doctrines are of such a nature, that to preach them faithfully requires great zeal for God, and the most disinterested love to souls. To describe to sinners that vile and loathsome character which belongs to all the unregenerate, to repeat to them the awful denunciations of divine wrath, and to describe to them the amazing horrors of that damnation which awaits them, are duties in themselves most unpleasant and painful. In like manner also it is in declaring the duties which God has enjoined. To point out and enforce some of them, is in itself very pleasant and interesting; while others are of such a nature, that to point them out clearly, and urge them home to the consciences of men, is in itself extremely painful, and calls for the exercise of the greatest self-denial. The minister, nevertheless, must not shrink from his duty. He *must* discharge it, however disagreeable, as he would be faithful to his Master, and faithful to the souls committed to his care.

There is one subject, however, which ministers are apt to pass over in silence, though it is intimately connected with the best interests of their people, and is of vital importance to the cause of Christ. This neglect probably arises from the peculiar delicacy of the subject, and the great difficulty ministers find of attending to it in a proper manner without being subjected to the charge of doing it from selfish motives, and not from a sense of duty to God and their people. The subject

of which I speak, is the duty of a people to support, in a suitable manner, the ministers of the gospel. When I concluded to take up this subject, and prepare a discourse upon it for this day, I expected that this would be the last Sabbath I should ever spend with this people; and that consequently I should not subject myself to the charge of pleading my own cause, by attending to it. Some circumstances have taken place, however, from which I have concluded not to leave this people, for the present. But I do not consider this as any reason why I should not perform my duty. Let what will, be said or thought, of me or my motives, in consequence of it, I dare not disobey the command of God to declare all his counsel; I dare not neglect to call your attention to this subject, and to endeavor to set your duty clearly before you. I have selected, therefore, as the subject of our present meditation, that portion of divine truth which is recorded in the third chapter of the prophet Malachi, at the eighth verse.

MALACHI 3. 8.

"*Will a man rob God? yet ye have robbed me. But ye say, wherein have we robbed thee? In tithes and offerings.*"

It will be recollected by all who are conversant with their bibles, that the tithes were the stated allowance, set apart by the authority of God, at the giving of the law, for the support of the ministers of religion; and that of the offerings, a great part also was devoted to the same purpose. In the text, God charges the people, in the days of the prophet, with robbing him. And when the people pleaded not guilty to the charge, and confidently asked "wherein have we robbed thee?" he replied, that they were guilty of robbing him, because they had withheld the tithes and offerings. The doctrine, then, contained in the text, is the following:

When a people withhold a suitable support from the ministers of religion, they are guilty of robbing God.

To illustrate this doctrine, and prepare it for our improvement, it is proposed,

I. To inquire what is a suitable support for the ministers of religion.

II. To show when a people may be said to withhold it. And

III To show that when a people withhold a suitable support from the ministers of religion, they are guilty of robbing God.

First, then, we are to inquire what is a suitable support for the ministers of religion. And in order to assist us in determining this question, let us inquire what is God's opinion. He knows better than we, and has no selfish interests to bias his mind to either side of the ques-

tion. God's opinion of what is a suitable support for the ministers of religion, is expressed in the provision which he made for them under the old dispensation.

The whole tribe of Levi were set apart, by the command of God, as the ministers of religion. Out of this tribe, the house of Aaron were appointed to offer sacrifices, and to minister in holy things at the altar. Some of their brethren of the other families of Levites were assigned them as assistants in these services. But those not immediately engaged in these services, resided in different parts of the country, and officiated as public instructors.

The provision which God thought suitable for their temporal support, will be seen by examining a few passages of scripture. Lev. 27. 30, 32. "And all the tithe of the land, whether of the seed of the land, or of the fruit of the tree, is the Lord's: It is holy unto the Lord. And concerning the tithe of the herd, or of the flock, even of whatsoever passeth under the rod, the tenth shall be holy unto the Lord." Num. 18. 21. "And behold I have given the children of Levi all the tenth in Israel, for an inheritance, for their service which they serve, even the service of the tabernacle of the congregation." Thus it appears, that the Levites were to have "*all the tenth in Israel*," for their support. The tenth of the fruits of the field, of the seed of the land, of the fruit of the tree, and the tenth of the herd and of the flock, are enumerated, because they were an agricultural and pastoral people. But those who pursued other occupations were undoubtedly comprehended in this law, and were also required to pay the tenth of the proceeds of their labor, or of their occupation, whatever it might be. They were to have "all the tenth in Israel."

Besides this tenth, as a stated salary, they were also furnished with parsonages, which were extensive and ample. Num. 35. 1—3, 7. "And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying, Command the children of Israel, that they give unto the Levites, of the inheritance of their possession, cities to dwell in; and ye shall give also unto the Levites suburbs for the cities round about them. And the cities shall they have to dwell in; and the suburbs of them shall be for their cattle, and for their goods, and for all their beasts. All the cities which ye shall give to the Levites shall be forty and eight cities: them shall ye give with their suburbs." As all the tithes were to be paid in kind, and the Israelites were a nation of shepherds, the chief property of the Levite would consist in his flocks and herds. The suburbs were to be sufficient for these. And they were to have forty-eight cities, in a country

which is less in extent than one seventh part of the state of New-York. Thus their parsonages were very ample.

For the house of Aaron, however, still further provision was made. They probably had more arduous services to perform than the other Levites, being the only persons authorized to officiate at the altar. This further provision was made. partly at the expence of the other Levites, and partly at the expence of the people at large. The other Levites were required to tithe their tithe, or to give a tenth of what they received from the people at large, to the house of Aaron. Num. 18. 25—28. "And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying, thus speak unto the Levites, and say unto them, when ye take of the children of Israel the tithes, which I have given you from them for your inheritance. then ye shall offer up an heave offering of it for the Lord, even a tenth part of the tithe. And ye shall give the Lord's heave offering to Aaron the priest." Additional provision for the house of Aaron was also made at the expence of the people at large. The offerings and sacrifices, which were required of the people of Israel, were very numerous. Of these, the priest who officiated always had a considerable share, and sometimes almost the whole. Deut. 18. 3, 4. "And this shall be the priest's due from the people, from them that offer a sacrifice, whether it be ox or sheep: and they shall give unto the priest the shoulder, and the two cheeks, and the maw. The first fruit also of thy corn, of thy wine, and of thine oil, and the first of the fleece of thy sheep, shalt thou give him." Num. 18. 8—14. "And the Lord spake unto Aaron, behold I have given thee the charge of mine heave offerings of all the hallowed things of the children of Israel; unto thee have I given them, by reason of the anointing, and to thy sons, by an ordinance for ever. This shall be thine of the most holy things reserved from the fire: every oblation of theirs, every meat offering of theirs, and every sin offering of theirs, and every trespass offering of theirs, which they shall render unto me, shall be most holy for thee, and for thy sons. In the most holy place shalt thou eat it; every male shall eat it: it shall be holy unto thee. And this is thine; the heave offering of their gift, with all the wave offerings of the children of Israel: I have given them unto thee, and to thy sons, and to thy daughters with thee, by a statute for ever; every one that is clean in thy house shall eat of it. *All the best* of the oil, and *all the best* of the wine, and of the wheat, the first fruits of them, which they shall offer unto the Lord, them have I given thee. And whatsoever is first ripe in the land, which they shall bring unto the Lord, shall be thine; every one that

is clean in thine house shall eat of it. Every thing devoted in Israel shall be thine."

Thus, then, we see, that God gave the Levites "all the tenth in Israel," as a stated salary, besides an ample parsonage to every one. And to the house of Aaron a large additional provision.

But a more correct idea of the extent of the provision which God made, under the law, for the ministers of religion, will be obtained by comparing the number of the Levites with the number of the whole people. If they had been just a tenth part of the people, their salary, being "all the tenth in Israel," would have been just an equal proportion of all the earnings of the nation. That is, taking all other men at an average, they would have been made exactly equal to them, by their salary alone, and would have had their parsonages over and above this equal proportion. But the Levites were not a tenth part of all the people. When the people were numbered, in the wilderness of Sinai, soon after they came out of Egypt, (Num. 1. 45, 46,) the males above twenty years, capable of bearing arms, in the other tribes, were *six hundred and three thousand, five hundred and fifty.* Those under twenty years, and those above if not capable of bearing arms, were not numbered; but they were probably nearly as many more. But supposing they were only half as many more, this would make all the males *nine hundred and five thousand, three hundred and twenty-five.* All the males among the Levites, from a month old and upward, were numbered at the same time, (Num. 3. 39,) and found to be *twenty-two thousand.* The people were numbered again, forty years afterwards, and the proportion was nearly the same. So that, instead of being one tenth of all the people, the Levites were less than one fortieth. And the stated salary of the Levite, instead of barely making him equal with other men, upon an average, makes his proportion more than *four times* that of other men!

To make this still plainer, let us suppose these *nine hundred and five thousand* men to earn each *one dollar* per day, on an average. Each man pays of this *ten cents* to the Levites, and has left to himself *ninety cents.* The whole sum paid to the Levites, is *ninety thousand, five hundred dollars;* which, divided by twenty-two thousand, the whole number of Levites, gives each Levite *four dollars* and *eleven cents* per day, while other men have but *ninety cents* each per day! And besides this, they had their parsonages. And this was the provision made for those whose services could not have been at all arduous. But for the house of Aaron, a far greater provision was made. How am-

ply, then, did God provide for his ministers, under the old dispensation!

Shall we say that this provision was too much? Shall we say that the revenues of the ministers of religion ought not to be four times as much as those of other men? Shall we say, as many do say, in so many words, and more by their practice, that so far from having more than other men, they ought to have less? that a bare subsistence is enough for them, while those around them possess abundance? It appears that God has thought otherwise. And if God thought that a suitable provision for them was four times as much as for other men, on an average, who will undertake to say that God was mistaken? Thus, we have, from the scriptures, God's opinion of what is a suitable provision for the ministers of religion. He knew very well the selfish dispositions of men, and that if it was left to them to determine what should be given to his ministers, they would be left to starve. He, therefore, did not leave any thing to depend upon their discretion, or their generosity, but pointed out, in the minutest manner, every thing that he required to be done for them.

It will perhaps be said, that all this was under the old dispensation, and that God has not thought proper that his ministers should receive so much under the new. But, let me ask, how does it appear, that they ought to receive less now, than formerly? Are their duties any less arduous? No; they are far more so. Are their wants fewer now, than they were under the old dispensation? No; by the different state of society they are greatly increased. Is God any less mindful of the necessities of his servants now, than formerly? This cannot be supposed. What ground is there, then, to suppose that God's opinion, or his requirements on this subject are changed? Will it be said, that he has not, in the new testament, expressly required that his ministers should receive "all the tenth," and that, therefore, it is no longer suitable that they should? But, let me ask, is the old testament abolished? Are not the duties enjoined in the old testament as much binding now as ever, unless they have been expressly abolished, or were in their own nature temporary? But the duty of making suitable provision for the ministers of religion, was not temporary in its nature, nor has it been abolished. Nor is it any where hinted in the new testament that the proportion they formerly received was too great, or that they ought to receive a less proportion now. Besides, this is only quoted to show what was once God's opinion of what is a suitable support for his ministers. If, however, he has once expressed his opinion, and

has no where told us that he has changed it, what right have we to say it does not remain the same?

But if it should be granted, that the stated salary of the ministers of religion, under the present dispensation, should not be precisely "all the tenth," as it was under the law, then it may be necessary to take several things into consideration, in order to determine what is a suitable support for the ministers of religion now. And here, it may be observed,

1. That the ministers of religion should have it in their power to be honest. When men make engagements, it is a species of dishonesty not to fulfil them. When they contract debts, it is a species of dishonesty not to discharge them punctually. Ministers must provide for their families. In doing this, they must make engagements and contract debts. And their support ought to be such, as to enable them to fulfil their engagements like honest men. They ought not to be compelled to defraud their creditors, nor to starve their families. Will it be said, that they should preserve their character as honest men, by not contracting debts beyond their means of punctual payment? It is very true. But since, if they do not provide for their own house, they practically deny the faith, and are worse than infidels, they must have the means of doing it. They must, therefore, have a certain dependence, which is adequate to supply all the necessities of their families, and meet all their engagements with punctuality.

2. Ministers ought to have it in their power to be respectable. A man without respectability, is without influence. And a man without influence, is without the power of doing good. A minister must be respectable. But it is well known that a man's respectability, in the eyes of a great portion of the community, depends, in a great measure, on his appearance. He may be honest, he may be pious, he may be learned, he may be faithful in his ministerial duties, but if he is mean and sordid in his appearance, if he wears the marks of poverty and want, he will be despised. These things, indeed, ought not so to be, but these things are. When his people visit his house, they expect to be received genteelly, and to be entertained with the best. And if they are not, they never attribute it to his want of support, but to his want of respect for them, or to his want of economy, or what is still worse to his covetousness. If a minister, on his journies, is obliged by his poverty to resort to those means of avoiding expence, which other men do not practice, he makes himself contemptible. Those who witness it, never ascribe it to the true cause, but to a mean and avaricious spirit, which

they despise. A suitable support, therefore, for the ministers of religion, must be such as will enable them in all things to maintain their respectability, upon which their influence, and their power of doing good, essentially depend.

3. Ministers ought to have it in their power to be charitable and public spirited. If they are the ministers of Jesus, they plead the cause of the poor and the fatherless. They inculcate the duties of charity and liberality. They expose to their hearers the utter inconsistency of a close, illiberal, covetous spirit, with the profession of christianity. But of what avail is their preaching, unless they preach by example? How can they persuade others to give to the poor, unless they give to the poor? How can they persuade others to be liberal and public spirited, unless they give an example of liberality and public spiritedness? And let me tell you that if you will pay ministers their tithes, they will gladly tithe their tithe, for charitable, religious, and public purposes. When they look around them, they see objects enough which call for their contributions. The poor need to be fed, and clothed, and their children educated. The sick poor need to be provided with something comfortable. Destitute settlements need to be provided with missionaries. The heathen need to have the gospel sent to them. Poor and pious youth need to be educated for the ministry. Churches need to be built and seminaries of learning to be supported. Societies for the distribution of bibles and of religious tracts need to be furnished with funds. The minister of religion earnestly desires to see these things accomplished. His heart is open. And if he had the means in his hand, they would go cheerfully and liberally to these objects. And if he could set an example, he could freely invite others to follow it. But his own poverty closes his hand and stops his mouth.

4. Ministers ought to have it in their power to make improvement in their manner of discharging the duties of their calling. The minister of religion should be a scribe well instructed. An ignorant ministry is contemptible and useless. In this age of philosophy and infidelity, it is indispensible that the ministers of religion should be men of science. The enemies of religion are frequently men of learning and abilities. Some of the most active and subtle of them are men of great attainments in human knowledge. And their most powerful attacks upon our religion, are supported by pretended facts in history or philosophy. The ministers of religion ought to be qualified to defend it against all attacks. The history of the world, therefore, both ancient

and modern, and the philosophy of nature, ought to be familiar to them. An accurate knowledge of the scriptures is indispensible in those whose office it is to explain them. But this is a work of great labor. To understand them thoroughly, it is necessary to read them in the inspired originals, and to be well acquainted with the geography, history, chronology, manners, customs, opinions, transactions and events, of all the countries and nations there spoken of, that is, of the whole world. It is necessary also, that the minister of religion should have an accurate knowledge of the human heart, be well acquainted with the world, understand the nature of the human mind and its operations, be acquainted with the systems of logic, rhetoric, and metaphysics, and be well versed in the writings of every description of men, upon every subject. To do all this, he must have time, and he must have books. His support, therefore, ought to be such, that he may furnish himself with an extensive library of the best books upon every subject, and have time to devote to them. Our people expect all this knowledge in a minister, and they expect he will continue to grow in knowledge, and make rapid improvement in every thing connected with the duties of his calling. And they expect it just as much in those who are not furnished with the means, as in those who are. Every one exclaims at the cruelty and injustice of the Egyptian task-masters, who required the Israelites to make brick without furnishing them with the necessary straw. But our people are more unreasonable than the Egyptian task-masters. They, indeed, withheld the straw, but they allowed the same time as before, for the work to be done. But our people require us to make great improvements, not only without furnishing us with the necessary books, but without any time to study the few we may have.

5. Ministers ought to have it in their power to educate their children. If ministers of the gospel are good men, and faithful in their own house, they will train up their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. They will instil into their minds correct principles, and form them to virtuous habits. But religious instruction, though essential, is not all that is necessary to qualify them for usefulness in the world. They need other instruction, in common with other children. A minister of the gospel is not destitute of the feelings of nature, any more than other men. And he will feel as anxious as other parents do, to give his children such an education as will be most likely to promote their happiness and respectability in the world. A minister of the gospel ought to be benevolent. He ought

to feel a deep interest in the happiness of the community. He ought, therefore, to give his children such an education as will prepare them to be most useful to society. But, to do this, is attended with no inconsiderable expence. He ought, therefore, to receive such a support, as will enable him to do this in a suitable manner.

6. Ministers ought to have it in their power to make some provision for their families, in case they should be taken away by death. Ministers of the gospel, more frequently perhaps than the men of any other profession, wear themselves out early, and are taken away in the middle of life, leaving a helpless widow, and a number of fatherless children, in the most destitute and indigent circumstances. This is a common case. And how must the minister of the gospel feel, when he contemplates it? How must he feel, when he looks upon his family around him, and reflects that the continuance of his life is their only earthly dependence? How must it embitter his departing moments, when, upon the bed of death, he looks around him with all the feelings of the husband and the father, and knows that he is leaving those who are dearest to him to beggary and wretchedness!—Is this the reward due to his faithful labors? Is this the return made by a grateful people, for all his unwearied attention to their best interests? Is this the certain prospect he has before him, when wearing out his life in their service? —These things ought not so to be. A suitable support would make provision against the possibility of such an event.

Thus, we see, that a suitable support for the ministers of religion, must be one that will enable them to be honest—to be respectable—to set an example of charity and liberality—to provide themselves with the means of improvement—to educate their children—and to make some provision for their widows and orphans, when they leave the world.

We come now, as was proposed,

II. To show when a people may be said to withhold a suitable support from the ministers of religion.

And 1. A state may be said to withhold a suitable support from the ministers of religion, when it makes no provision by law for them. The support of religious institutions is essential to the prosperity of the state. As guardians of the public welfare, the civil rulers are bound to see that they are supported. The most equitable method for doing this, is to pass a law, which shall oblige every man to pay his equal proportion, according to his property, for the support of the ministers of religion; giving no preference, however, to one denomination above

another, and allowing every man to pay to the minister of his own sect. But when a state do not make such provision, when they do not oblige men to pay any thing for the support of such institutions, and when they even neglect to render a contract between a minister and his people of any validity, and put it out of his power to compel the fulfilment of it, that state may be justly said to withhold a suitable support from the ministers of religion.

2. A congregation may be said to withhold a suitable support from the minister of religion, when they do not make any permanent provision for it, upon which he can depend; when they invite a minister to settle with them, and expect him to depend, for his support, upon contributions to be made from time to time, upon temporary subscriptions, or collections. Nothing is more unreasonable, than to require stated services without a stated compensation. Nothing is more unreasonable than for a people to expect a minister will give his whole time to them, and yet depend upon their good will and pleasure, from time to time, whether he has any thing to live upon or not. And yet there are many people, who refuse to do any thing to support the ministers of religion, in any other way than this. It is a maxim with them that ministers must be kept down. They must be made to feel their dependence. They must be made continually sensible, that it depends entirely upon their pleasing their people, whether they live or starve. Such men say, if ministers have a certain support, they will become too proud and insolent, which means, that if they are not made to dread the displeasure of such men, they will be too pointed in their preaching, and too faithful in the discharge of the duties of their office. I have heard men express themselves in this manner, and I do not think it is unfrequent. When a minister has no fixed salary it is impossible he should know how to make his calculations. It is impossible that he should know how to live, in order to keep within his income, unless he knows what that income will be. But if he depends upon the voluntary contributions of people, from time to time, he will lean upon a broken reed. When a people, therefore, will not engage their minister a fixed salary, large enough to make a suitable provision for him, they may be said to withhold a suitable provision. And when individuals will not engage to pay a stipulated sum, they may be said also to withhold from the minister of religion a suitable support. It will come to the same thing also, when a congregation, or when individuals, promise a certain sum, but will not come into such engagements with their minister, that he can depend upon it with cer-

tainty; they refuse to bind themselves in such a manner that he can collect it by law. They promise, indeed, but the fulfilment of their promise is left to depend upon contingencies. which may or may not happen. So that the minister may receive his promised salary, or he may not. If he is wise, he will not trust much to such promises. When people refuse to bind themselves to fulfil their engagements, he will have reason to fear that some, at least, will fail. When the acting agents of a society promise a certain salary, and then neglect to provide for the fulfilment of that promise, the effect is the same. A suitable support is withheld.

3. Individuals may be said to withhold a suitable support from the ministers of religion, when they refuse to contribute their equal proportion, according to their property. for that purpose If the civil authority have not made any law which requires this, it is not less certain that it is required by the law of God. Under the old dispensation, every man was required to pay the tenth of what he had, be it more or less. And under the new dispensation, the apostle, in requiring the Corinthians to contribute for a religious purpose, taught that there ought to be an equality. "For I mean not, (says he,) that other men be eased, and you burdened. But—that there may be an equality." Although persons may pay something, and more than many others do, yet if they do not pay their equal proportion, according to their property, of what would be a suitable support, for a suitable number of ministers, they may be justly said to withhold a suitable support from the ministers of religion.

4. People may be said to withhold a suitable support from the ministers of religion, when they make engagements, but never fulfil them. This is so plain, that it needs no illustration, but it is so frequent that it calls for serious consideration. It is a common case, that people make engagements with ministers, and never fulfil them. *We have heard* of societies which have had a minister settled with them for twelve or fourteen years, and never made a settlement with him in all that time. And this, although they had bound themselves by the most solemn engagements, to pay his small pittance with punctuality. And at the end of that period, when he was compelled to leave them, he was still unpaid; and never was paid the full amount of his stipulated salary. When a people conduct in this manner, they are certainly guilty of withholding a suitable support from the ministers of religion.

5. People may be said to withhold a suitable support from the ministers of religion, when they promise a sufficient support, and intend to

pay what they promise, at some time, when it suits their convenience, but do not pay it punctually. Although all that was promised should be ultimately paid, yet much of its value is lost, for want of punctuality. If a minister is paid punctually, he can fulfil his engagements, keep up his credit, and always be able to obtain a supply of necessaries for his family. But if he is not paid punctually, he cannot meet his engagements which have been made in dependence upon it, he loses his credit, and puts it out of his power, another time, to obtain, without prompt pay, the necessaries of life. When people delay the payment of their subscription, after it becomes due, and then neglect to pay the interest on it, (and the interest is very seldom a compensation for such delay); and especially, when, by this delay, they compel their minister to pay interest on an equal sum, which is a common case, they may be justly said to withhold from him that which is his due, they are guilty of withholding a suitable support from the minister of religion.

6. A people may be said to withhold a suitable support from the minister of religion, when they do not increase the nominal amount of his stipulated salary, upon a decrease of its value. That sum of money which at one time might be a sufficient support, may at another time be very inadequate. The necessaries of life are often changing in price. A minister may be settled when the price of wheat is one dollar per bushel, and other things in proportion. The salary promised may then be an adequate support. Afterwards the price of wheat becomes two dollars per bushel, and other things accordingly. It is easy to see that his salary has lost one half of its value, and must be doubled in amount, in order to be equal to what it was at first. But when a people do not increase the amount, in exact proportion to the decrease of value, when the necessaries of life are doubled and trebled in price, and they refuse to add accordingly to the stipulated salary, they may be justly said to withhold from their minister a suitable support.

We come now, as was proposed,

III. To show, that when a people withhold a suitable support from the ministers of religion, they are guilty of robbing God.

And 1. God required the tithes, under the law, as *his due*, from the people. Lev. 27. 30, 32. "And all the tithe of the land, whether of the seed of the land, or of the fruit of the tree, *is the Lord's*: it is *holy unto the Lord*." And concerning the tithe of the herd, or of the flock, even of whatsoever passeth under the rod, the tenth shall be *holy unto the Lord*." The tithes, therefore, were *God's due*. And to withhold

them, was to withhold them from God, it was to rob God of his right. God gave the tithes to the Levites, as their wages, for the service which they rendered to him. Num. 18. 21. "And behold, *I have given* the children of Levi all the tenth in Israel, for an inheritance, *for their service* which they serve, even the service of the tabernacle of the congregation." When the Levites received them, they received them as from God, and not as from the people. When the people paid them, they paid them to God. And when they withheld them, they withheld them from God. When they withheld them therefore, they withheld that which was God's due, they were guilty of robbing God.

2. By the change of dispensation, there has been no change in the nature of these things. If there had been, the new testament would have informed us. But we find there, no hint of any such change. What is paid now, therefore, for the support of religious institutions, is as much paid to God, as it ever was. And the ministers of religion receive their support now, as wages from God, for the service which they render to him, as much as they ever did. When people withhold it now, they withhold it from God, as much as they ever did. And when they withhold from God that which is his due, they are guilty of robbing God.

But 3. If it should be said that the nature of these things *is* changed, under the new dispensation, although there is no proof of such a change, still it can be shown, that when a people withhold a suitable support from the ministers of religion, they are guilty of robbing God. For it is easy to prove that ministers are entitled to their support, and that not as a *gift* from their people, as some would have it, for which they ought to feel under very great obligations, but as *wages*, properly speaking, as *hire* for the services they render. When our Lord sent forth his disciples to preach, he said to them, Mat. 10. 9, "Provide neither gold, nor silver, nor brass, in your purses, nor scrip for your journey, neither two coats, neither shoes, nor yet staves; for the workman is worthy of his meat." In Luke 10. 7, it is, "For the laborer is worthy of his *hire*." Here, our Lord taught, that they were entitled to receive a sufficient supply of all the comforts of life, as *hire* for the service they rendered, in the same sense that other workmen are entitled to receive wages for their labor; that it was as much a *debt* due to them, as the wages of other workmen are a *debt* due to them. The same truth is taught also by the apostle. 1 Cor. 9. 7—14. "Who goeth a warfare any time at his own charges? Who planteth a vineyard, and eateth not of the fruit thereof? Or who feedeth a flock, and

eateth not of the milk of the flock? Say I these things as a man? or saith not the law the same also? For it is written in the law of Moses, Thou shalt not muzzle the mouth of the ox that treadeth out the corn. Doth God take care for oxen? Or saith he it altogether for our sakes? For our sakes, no doubt, this is written; that he that ploweth, should plow in hope; and that he that thrasheth in hope should be partaker of his hope. If we have sown unto you spiritual things, is it a great thing if we shall reap your carnal things? Do ye not know, that they which minister about holy things live of the things of the temple? and they which wait at the altar are partakers with the altar? *Even so hath the Lord ordained that they which preach the gospel should live of the gospel.*" The apostle, it is true, did sometimes waive his right to receive a temporal support from the people to whom he preached. There were occasions in which it was expedient for him to do so. But he always insisted that it was his right, his just due, as *wages* for the service he rendered. On one occasion of this kind, he says, 2 Cor. 11. 8, "I robbed other churches, taking *wages* of them, to do you service." To the Galatians, he says, chap. 6. 6, "Let him that is taught in the word, communicate unto him that teacheth, in all good things." This looks like an injunction to pay the tithe of every thing in its kind, as was the commandment of the law. To Timothy, he says, 1 Tim. 5. 17, "Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially they who labor in the word and doctrine." What this "double honor" was, appears from the next verse, "For the scripture saith, thou shalt not muzzle the ox that treadeth out the corn. And, the laborer is worthy of his *reward.*" This "double honor," was a double portion of the good things of this life, as a *reward due* for their faithful services.

Thus, it appears, that in the new testament, we are plainly taught, that the ministers of religion are entitled to a sufficient support from their people, as *hire*, as *wages*, as a *reward*, which is due to them for their services, as much as to any other laborer for his services. But when we employ a man to reap our fields, and keep back his wages, it is defrauding him of his right, it is robbery. So, when a people keep back the wages of a minister of religion, it is defrauding him of his right, it is robbery. But Christ considers what is done to his ministers, as done to him. And what is done to him, is done to God. Christ says to his ministers, Mat. 10. 40, "He that receiveth you, receiveth me; and he that receiveth me, receiveth him that sent me." And Luke 10. 16, "He that heareth you, heareth me; and he that despiseth you,

despiseth me; and he that despiseth me, despiseth him that sent me." And in the great day, he will say, as he informs us, Mat. 25. 40. "Verily I say unto you, in as much as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me." To rob the ministers of Christ, therefore, by withholding the wages due for their services, is to rob Christ, it is to rob God.

4. Withholding a suitable support from the ministers of religion, is robbing God, because it robs God of their services. Ministers must live. Their families must have bread. When a suitable support is withheld, they are driven to the labors of the field or to some other secular employment, in order to procure necessaries for their families. And thus, much of their time, which ought to be devoted to the service of God, in the duties of their calling, is consumed in other avocations. Ministers are expected by their people to spend their whole time in the duties of their sacred calling whether they are supported or not. They are expected always to preach well studied, instructive, and profitable discourses, whether they have any time to study or not. And they are expected to spend a great part of their time in visiting their people, whether they have any time to spare for that purpose or not. God is entitled to their whole time, but he is robbed of much of it, when people withhold from ministers their wages. And when people keep back the wages of the minister, they cause those services which he does render, to be very imperfect. They compel him to serve God with the lame and the blind. When ministers are not furnished with books, and when they are compelled to resort to some other employment to support their families, their discourses are unstudied, and of course, they are crude, undigested performances, totally unfit for the service of the sanctuary. It is true that some preachers say *they* have no need to study. *Their* discourses are the effect of immediate inspiration. But ministers in general are not favored with these miraculous gifts, and they do not wish to impose their crude, imperfect performances upon people. as the effusions of the Holy Ghost. They think the oil for the sanctuary should be well beaten, before it is brought in for use. And to serve God with the lame and the blind, they think is very unsuitable, and is robbing him of that which is his due. And how few ministers are there, in comparison with what there might be, if people would pay their tithes. How many places are destitute of ministers, which might support them with perfect ease. How many people never hear the sound of the gospel at all, to whom it would be preached, if every man paid his just proportion of their wages. When

young men, who are qualified for the ministry, behold the numerous discouragements which attend it, when they see the miserable manner in which ministers are supported, how strong an inducement must it be to engage in some other profession. When they see before them, in the other professions, a prospect of more than a comfortable support, and in this, the certain prospect of poverty and want, how exceedingly apt will they be to consider it as an indication of divine providence that they ought not to enter the sacred profession. When those who have entered the ministry, have seen and felt, by their own sad experience, the selfishness and the penuriousness of most people, with respect to ministerial support; when they have seen with how great difficulty men are induced to subscribe, not the tenth, but the hundredth or the thousandth part of their income, and think their minister ought to feel under very great obligations to them for that; and when they have seen the extreme tardiness with which that miserable pittance is paid, and the vast return of gratitude which these people expect, when they pay the tenth or the hundredth part of what is justly due; when they have been compelled to see and feel these things, how strong will be their inducements to relinquish the ministry altogether. When they look around upon their helpless families, how do all the feelings of the husband and the father plead with them to abandon a profession which promises them nothing but beggary and wretchedness!—But if every man paid his just proportion, according to what, in the opinion of God, as expressed in the law, it is suitable for him to pay, the number of ministers would be greatly increased. They would be enabled to give themselves entirely to the duties of their sacred function; the word of God might be faithfully and ably preached, in the hearing of every man, songs of praise and thanksgiving would ascend to God, from places which now resound with curses and blasphemies, multitudes would be turned from darkness to light, and God would be honored and served by millions, who are now the willing slaves of sin and Satan! When God, therefore, is deprived of all this glory, by withholding from the ministers of religion that support which is their just due, it is not only robbery of them, but it is robbery of God.

But 5. That when a people withhold a suitable support from the ministers of religion, they are guilty of robbing God, is the express declaration of the text. "Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed me. But ye say, wherein have we robbed thee? In tithes and offerings." The people kept back their tithes. They probably thought it was too much, to give the Levites "all the tenth in Israel." They could not

afford to pay so much. Their own families needed it. To give the Levites four times as much as was left for any other man, upon an average, was quite unreasonable and extravagant. Let them live upon their parsonages, and labor for their support, like other men. In this manner, they probably reasoned, and so kept back the tithes. And when God called them to account, and charged them with robbing him, they boldly denied the charge, and said, with confidence, "Wherein have we robbed thee?" God replies, "In tithes and offerings." That is, Ye have kept back from my ministers that proportion of your earnings which I commanded to be given them, and therefore, ye have robbed me.

What remains is the

IMPROVEMENT.

And 1. If the doctrine we have supported is true, then, when people withhold a suitable support from the ministers of religion, with a view of increasing their own property by so doing, they will probably be disappointed. They rob God. And if men think to be gainers by robbing God, they will be disappointed. They may rob their neighbors, and prosper. But to rob God, is a crime of a very different nature. It is to commit sacrilege. It is a crime which calls for the peculiar indignation of heaven. The hope of increasing their own property, by adding to it what they withhold from the ministers of religion, is undoubtedly the principal motive, if it is not the only motive, which influences people to withhold from them a suitable support. They think they cannot afford to pay so much, merely to support the gospel. They wish to increase their own property, by every means in their power, and so they refuse to pay. But when people think to increase their property in this way, they will probably find they have made a great mistake. The Jews tried it, but they were disappointed. They withheld the tithes and offerings, that they might add them to their own stores. They robbed God, to make themselves rich. But it did not answer their expectations. God says, in the text, "Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed me. But ye say, wherein have we robbed thee? In tithes and offerings." And in the verse succeeding the text, he says, "Ye are cursed with a curse: for ye have robbed me, even this whole nation." They were cursed with a curse; and it was for robbing God, by withholding a suitable support from his ministers. They robbed him also, by neglecting to build his temple, and provide, in a suitable manner, for his worship. And he says to them, by the prophet Haggai, (ch. 1. 5—11, & 2. 15—17,) "Now, therefore, con-

sider your ways. Ye have sown much, and bring in little; ye eat, but ye have not enough; ye drink, but ye are not filled with drink; ye clothe you, but there is none warm; and he that earneth wages, earneth wages to put it into a bag with holes. Ye looked for much, and lo, it came to little; and when ye brought it home, I did blow upon it. Why? saith the Lord of hosts. Because of mine house that is waste, and ye run every man unto his own house. Therefore the heaven over you is stayed from dew, and the earth is stayed from her fruit. And I called for a drought upon the land, and upon the mountains, and upon the corn, and upon the new wine, and upon the oil, and upon that which the ground bringeth forth, and upon men, and upon cattle, and upon all the labor of the hands." "And now I pray you consider, from this day and upward, from before a stone was laid upon a stone in the temple of the Lord; since those days were when one came to an heap of twenty measures, there were but ten: when one came to the press-fat for to draw out fifty vessels out of the press, there were but twenty. I smote you with blasting, and with mildew, and with hail, in all the labors of your hands." So far from increasing their property, as they expected, by robbing God, they greatly lessened it. And those who rob God now, by withholding a suitable support from his ministers, or by refusing to build a temple for his worship, may expect, sooner or later, the same result. They may heap up their ill gotten gains, but how easy it is for God to blow upon them, and they vanish! But if men would take the most certain method of increasing their property, let them pay God his due. Let them cease to rob him or his ministers. For he says, in the verses which follow the text, "Bring ye all the tithes into the store house, that there may be meat in mine house, and *prove me now herewith*, saith the Lord of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it." As if he had said, Try me once and if I do not fulfil my word, never trust me again. He then adds, "And I will rebuke the devourer for your sakes, and he shall not destroy the fruits of your ground; neither shall your vine cast her fruit before the time in the field, saith the Lord of Hosts. And all nations shall call you blessed: for ye shall be a delightsome land, saith the Lord of Hosts." So true are the words of the wise man, (Prov. 11. 24,) "There is that scattereth, and yet increaseth; and there is that withholdeth more than is meet, but it tendeth to poverty."

2. In the light of this subject, we see the mistake of those who suppose it would be better to have ministers supported by a public fund,

their tenth? It is no more for a poor man to pay his tenth, than it is for the rich. If you are poor, your tenth will be small. If you are rich, it will be in exact proportion to what you possess. So, we see, that in God's opinion, the plea of inability is, in most cases, utterly vain. Where there are ten families, who can worship together, they are always able to support the gospel. No. it is not their inability, which keeps most societies from having the gospel among them. This plea is only used as a decent veil to hide their nakedness. It is a reason which they are ashamed to avow. *It is their covetousness.*

4. In the light of this subject, we see, that there is no reason to charge ministers with being *hirelings*, because they claim and receive a suitable support from their people. There is a great hue and cry made, at this day, against those ministers who claim a suitable support from their people, as though they were hirelings; and some who pretend to be preachers of the gospel themselves, are foremost in this clamor. But if claiming and receiving a suitable support, makes a man a hireling, then Paul was a hireling. For he says, he took wages of the church, and that for preaching. If this makes a man a hireling, then Christ taught his disciples to be hirelings. For he told them to make no provision for themselves, when they went forth to preach, because "the laborer is worthy of his *hire*." They should receive their wages where they performed their work. But receiving wages is not what makes a man a hireling. It is *selfishness* which constitutes a man a hireling. A man is a hireling, when the gain is his principal object. That preacher is a hireling, who cares only for what he can get, but cares not for the flock. That man is a hireling, who enters the ministry from any selfish motive; not only he who does it for the sake of gain, but he who does it for the sake of honor and distinction, because he loves to have the pre-eminence. There is little reason to think that men enter the ministry, at this day, who are qualified for the other learned professions, for the sake of gain. But there is reason to fear that some undertake to preach, who are not qualified for this, or any other learned profession, merely from an aspiring, ambitious spirit, that will not be content with the humble station for which Providence has qualified them. These are the true *hireling preachers*, notwithstanding their loud professions of disinterestedness. Paul was charged with being a hireling, by the false teachers of his day. They made so great a clamor at Corinth, about his receiving pay for preaching, that he thought it expedient to wave his right, in that place, and to *take wages of other churches*, while he preached to them. They made

this clamor, in order to destroy his influence, that they might take his place. To cut off occasion from them, he dispensed with his right. But he was very careful to inform the Corinthians of the true reason of his doing so, that they might not conclude it was because it is wrong to receive pay for preaching. He says, 2 Cor. 11. 8, "I robbed other churches, *taking wages of them to do you service.*" And then he expresses his determination to do so still. And afterwards he says, "Wherefore? Because I love you not? God knoweth." He was sensible that to those who esteemed it a privilege to honor the Lord with their substance, by supporting his ministers, it would seem in him like a want of love for them, if he declined it. He assures them that this was not the reason, and adds, "But what I do, that I will do, that I may cut off occasion from them which desire occasion; that wherein they glory, they may be found even as we." They gloried in their disinterestedness, in preaching the gospel without any pay. And he thought best, in this particular instance, to cut off occasion from them, by doing so too. But he tells us, in the following verses, what was the character of these men, who made such a parade of their disinterestedness, and raised such a clamor against him, because he took pay for preaching. He says, "For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ. And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness." No; there is no foundation for the charge against faithful ministers, of being hirelings, merely because they claim and receive that support, which to withhold is robbing God. And when people raise this clamor against them, for receiving what God commands to be given them, we have reason to conclude it is done merely to excuse themselves from paying any thing that it is merely as a cloak for their covetousness. And when pretended preachers are foremost in this clamor, we have reason to suspect they have some sinister design, which they wish to conceal by a great show of disinterested benevolence.

5. If those people who withhold a suitable support from the ministers of religion, are guilty of robbing God, then those ministers who countenance them in doing this, are partakers in their guilt. When ministers do not instruct their people in the nature of their duty, when their people live in disobedience, through ignorance of what God requires, then the ministers undoubtedly partake largely in the guilt. They ought to have taught their people all that God requires of them.

If people rob God, when they neglect their duty on this subject, then ministers ought to instruct their people upon this subject. True it is a subject of peculiar delicacy. And ministers expose themselves to the charge of selfishness, from all those whose selfish feelings may be disturbed, by a clear exhibition of what God requires. But ministers must do their duty, and leave the consequences with God. And if, through the fear of subjecting themselves to reproach, they pass over this subject in silence, and their people live in the habitual practice of robbing God, those ministers are partakers in the guilt. There are also many other ways, in which ministers may countenance people in this sin. I speak not here of those pretended preachers, of whom the apostle speaks, who, in the face of God's express command, deny the duty of supporting ministers; but I speak of those who acknowledge that God requires people to support the gospel, and yet countenance them in neglecting it. Ministers may countenance people in neglecting this duty, by giving currency to the plea of inability which is so often made by societies and by individuals. When this plea is made, in the hearing of ministers of the gospel, they ought to be very careful to set people right, on this subject, and not give currency to an opinion contrary to that which God has so frequently expressed in his word. Ministers may countenance people in this sin, by accepting an invitation to settle with a people, who do not offer such a support as is in their power, and such as is suitable for them to afford. Presbyteries and ordaining councils may countenance people in this sin, by ordaining and installing ministers among people who do not make a suitable provision for their support. A minister may countenance people in this sin, by suffering them to defraud him, and to rob God, in this way, from year to year, and using no means to bring them to attend to their duty in this respect. A minister who has other means of support, and does not insist upon the punctual performance of his people's engagements, because he is not actually in a state of suffering, is encouraging them in the neglect of present duty, and is preparing them to continue in the habitual practice of this sin, after he shall be taken away. He is training up the rising generation to be robbers of God. And a minister may countenance his people in this sin, by continuing with them, after he sees that they are determined not to do their duty on this subject. When a minister discovers among his people, a disposition not to do their duty in this respect, it his indispensible duty to bear testimony against their wickedness, and if they persist in it, to leave them. If he continues with them, while they do not, God will not support him, and at the same time they are able to do so, he countenances them in

robbing God, and is a partaker in their guilt. If his circumstances permit him to *give* his ministerial labors, *as a matter of charity*, he ought to give them to a people that need his charity.

6. In the light of this subject we see, that those who drive away ministers, by withholding a suitable support, are chargeable with the blood of those who perish for lack of vision. The preaching of the gospel is the appointed means of salvation. But, "where there is no vision, the people perish." For the apostle says, Rom. 10, 14, "How shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher?" When men drive away the ministers of religion, they drive away the preaching of the gospel. And when they drive away the preaching of the gospel, they drive away the means of salvation. And when they drive away the means of salvation, they are as really guilty of the blood of souls, as the man is guilty of murder, who withholds bread from the hungry till he dies. And when people neglect to establish the gospel among them, and are able to do so, the effect is the same. They withhold the bread of life, and the people perish. Let those, then who indulge themselves in withholding a suitable support from the ministers of religion, reflect upon the consequences of their conduct. They not only withhold from God that which is his right, but are taking the most direct means to effect the eternal destruction of their fellow men. They are not only guilty of robbery, and of sacrilege, but they are guilty of murder, the murder of immortal souls.

7. In the view of this subject, what must we think of those professors of religion, who withhold a suitable support from the ministers of the gospel? They are guilty of robbing God, and they are guilty of robbing his ministers. And they are not only guilty of robbery, and sacrilege, but they are guilty of murder. They are chargeable with the blood of souls. Can such be christians? If they defraud, and rob, both God and their neighbor, and withhold the bread of life from those who are perishing for hunger, what must we think of their religion? Must we not think it is vain? Must we not think they are no better than hypocrites? And we not unfrequently see persons make high professions of religion, and a great show of attachment to the cause of Christ, *while it costs nothing*; but when they are called upon to honor the Lord with their substance, and to evidence their attachment to Christ, by devoting a share of their property to him, they are sadly deficient. They have nothing to spare. They cannot afford to pay. They work hard for their property, and they want it themselves. Or if shame

prevents their refusing wholly, they contribute a mere trifle, they pay that which is next to nothing. But what must we think of such christians? Can they be christians, and have no more regard for the honor of Christ? Can they be christians, and have no more regard for the welfare of immortal souls? Can they be christians, and do they put so small a value upon the blessings of the gospel, that they cannot afford to pay a fiftieth, or a hundredth part of their income, for the sake of enjoying them? Can they be christians, and manifest no more regard for the positive commands of God? No duty is more clearly enjoined in the scriptures, than the duty of supporting the gospel. But what must we think of those who profess religion, and yet will not do their part? What saith the scripture? 1 John 2. 4, "He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him."

8. In the view of this subject, let every man examine himself. Are you guilty of robbing God? Are you guilty of withholding from the ministers of religion a suitable support? Let each individual examine himself, and review his whole conduct through life, in relation to this subject. And let this people, as a people, examine themselves. You had a minister formerly. How was he supported? Did you promise him as much as God requires his ministers should have? And how did you fulfil your engagements? Did you pay him with punctuality, or did you rob God, by withholding it? And has he, to this day, been paid all that was promised him? You have a minister now. But I leave it to every man's conscience to say, whether he is guilty of robbing God, with respect to him.

Finally. Let all who feel themselves reproved by this subject, be exhorted to repent and reform.

THE END.

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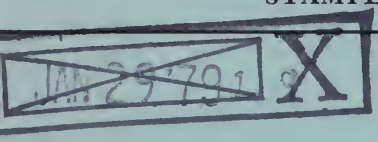

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